FAR FROM HOME, EUROPEAN SOLDIERS TRAIN FOR PEACE

FORT POLK, Louisiana, Aug 08, (AP) - For soldiers like Lithuanian Army Lt. Raimondas Ivanauskas, the fictitious island of Aragon is all too real. Invented for a NATO peacekeeping training exercise, the island divided by secession and ethnic conflict is quite similar to Croatia, where Ivanauskas recently did a six-month tour. "I expect to be sent back there," he said.

Nearly 700 soldiers from 14 Central and Eastern European countries gathered at Fort Polk on Monday for ``Cooperative Nugget '95." They will be joined by about 3,000 troops from the United States, England and Canada for the first exercise on U.S. soil involving Partnership for Peace nations.

While settling into barracks, soldiers, many on their first visit to the United States, talked about what they had heard about Louisiana and what they wanted to see. "The French meals, jazz music, hot weather, mosquitoes, and alligators," summarized Lt. Lolita Žegeriene, a public affairs officer for the Lithuanian army.

Some were baffled and intrigued by signs for local specialties they couldn't find in their pocket English dictionaries, including boiled crawfish and Po' Boy sandwiches.

U.S. DEFENSE SECRETARY GREETS LITHUANIAN SOLDIERS

VILNIUS, Aug 09, BNS - After opening ceremonies at which he adressed the soldiers participating Cooperative Nugget '95, U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry came up to Lithuanian soldiers for a brief conversation and noted that he would visit them in Lithuania in fall.

Meanwhile, the Lithuanians in Louisiana have already earned a reputation of fine athletes. They won a friendly basketball match against the Americans on their first night at Fort Polk. The Lithuanian soldiers also performed well in tug-of-war, accuracy and other contests that were held at an evening party on Tuesday.